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Mistakes Concerning Repentance

Repentance.
141. d.
Hobart.
510.

Leaven Leaves.

"*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*"
GALATIANS v. 9.

MISTAKES CONCERNING Repentance.

DELAY OF Repentance.

By BISHOP HOBART.

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141. d. 510.

" Except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh."—*Luke* xiii. 3.

MISTAKES

CONCERNING REPENTANCE.

THIS is the language of the Son of God, the Saviour and the Judge of the world. Delivered on occaſion of certain of his followers unjuſtly conſidering the Galileans ſlaughtered by Pilate as greater ſinners on account of this judgment which befell them, it inculcates on all the indiſpenſable neceſſity of repentance, as the only refuge from deſtruction. Repent, leſt ye periſh, is indeed the language which, in obedience to the injunctions of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, his Church and miniſters in every age addreſs to all deſcriptions of men. For

until man is releaſed from the dominion of ſin by repentance, he cannot enjoy the favour of God in this life, nor be fitted for his preſence in that heavenly kingdom into which entereth nothing that is unholy or unclean.

It is the language, therefore, which ſhould deeply impreſs us all, whatever our age, character, or condition—"Except we repent, we ſhall periſh."

The moſt intereſting inquiry, then, which any individual can propoſe to himſelf is—*Do I truly repent?*

But on this queſtion, as on every other connected with our ſalvation, we may delude ourſelves with falſe hopes. We may flatter ourſelves that we poſſeſs repentance, when, in reality, we are ſtrangers to this evangelical grace. The exerciſes of repentance muſt engage, in

a greater or leſs degree, all the powers of the ſoul. It muſt transform the affections, and change the whole character and conduct of man. It is a grace not of eaſy acquiſition; and in regard to which, the deceitfulneſs of the human heart is prompted to exert itſelf under circumſtances peculiarly favourable to ſucceſs.

Men *miſtake* concerning repentance.

1. They miſtake concerning the *nature* of repentance.

2. They miſtake concerning its *exerciſes* in *different perſons.*

3. Laſtly, they miſtake concerning the *power* by which repentance is *performed*, and the *grounds* on which God *accepts* it.

Give me your attention, my brethren, while I expoſe the various miſtakes to

which you are liable concerning repentance.

1. Men miſtake concerning the *nature* of repentance.

And on this point, how various and fundamental are their miſtakes. Some lay an undue ſtreſs on its internal exerciſes, and others, on its external effects.

Some will cheriſh ſorrow for their offences, while they are not equally careful that this ſorrow brings forth the fruits of righteouſneſs, the evidence and the conſequence of godly ſorrow for ſin. Others will aim merely at external correctneſs of deportment, not conſidering that, while their guilt and ingratitude demand deep contrition, it is this contrition only which, purifying our hearts, can make our actions, which proceed from our diſpoſitions and principles, pure

and upright. Brethren, your repentance, if genuine, while it wrought in you ſincere and lively contrition, cauſed alſo a holy abhorrence of ſin, an ardent deſire for deliverance from its dominion, an unceaſing and earneſt labour after a conformity in all reſpects to the law of God. Diſjoin not, therefore, what ſhould be inſeparable. Let godly ſorrow purify your hearts, and, through divine grace, ſee that this ſorrow produces its legitimate fruits, univerſal righteouſneſs of life.

Again, in regard to the internal exerciſes of repentance, what is the nature of that ſorrow for ſin from which every other genuine exerciſe of repentance ſprings? It ariſes from a lively compunction of conſcience, which, excited by a ſerious conſideration of the nature

and peculiar aggravations of our offences, diſſolves the ſoul in ſorrow, which the underſtanding approves and regulates. For this, many ſubſtitute a wild, tumultuous grief, which engages principally the animal paſſions, and indulges in the moſt violent extravagances. But, after theſe paſſions have ſpent themſelves, it ſubſides in the calm of indifference, or plunges its heated votary into ſenſual indulgences, worſe than thoſe from which it had momentarily reſcued him. Serious reflection is the parent of that genuine contrition which neither degrades its holy ſervours by the wild exceſſes of enthuſiaſm, nor permits them to be chilled or extinguiſhed by worldly purſuits and pleaſures.

But what is the cauſe that this ſorrow for ſin, eſſential to genuine repentance,

is, in many, ſo lukewarm in its exerciſe, and ſo ſuperficial in its effects? It is not founded on a deep ſenſe of the demerit of ſin. Theſe lukewarm and ſuperficial penitents have never placed the ſin which infects their nature and diſgraces their life, in the ſearching beams of the Word and Spirit of God. By the lights of this Word and Spirit, they have never diſcerned the odious features of ſin; they have never conſidered its impious purpoſes; warring againſt God; ſeeking to ſubvert the pillars that ſupport his throne; to wreſt from him the ſceptre of juſtice that rules the univerſe; to extinguiſh the lights of truth, of holineſs, and goodneſs, that diffuſe happineſs through his intelligent creation; and thus to plunge the moral univerſe into a chaos of guilt, of darkneſs, and of wo. Never have

they ſufficiently contemplated the ravages of ſin on their own ſouls, its deſtructive effects on their own felicity; defacing in them that image of his glorious perfections which God impreſſed; bringing them into an ignominious and corrupting bondage; kindling in them thoſe remorſes which will be finally ſucceeded by "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is never quenched" (Mark xi. 44). Had they thus contemplated the evil and guilt of ſin, what holy compunction for their ſubjection to its dominion would have filled their breaſts; what ardent, unremitted, perſevering ſtruggles againſt it would have been called forth!

But, even when the penitent ſurveys the odious features of ſin, he is ſometimes apt to dwell more on its tremen-

dous conſequences to himſelf, in expoſing him to divine wrath, than on its baſeneſs and ingratitude as committed againſt God. Infatuated by its intoxicating allurements, he has proceeded thoughtleſſly and joyfully on, until he finds himſelf on the very edge of the "burning lake" (Rev. xix. 20; xxi. 28). He ſees the ſmoke of its torments, the raging of its flames. He hears the "weeping, wailing, and gnaſhing of teeth" (Matt. viii. 12), of the ſpirits impriſoned in it. One ſtep more, and he ſinks into this lake of fire, this "Tophet" (Iſaiah xxx. 33) of God's wrath. He ſhudders, and cries for mercy.

Ah! this is the cry of ſelfiſh fear. It is not the cry of ingenuous ſorrow. It is not prompted by compunction for ſin

as an infraction of the righteous laws of God, as an inſult to the authority of his Maker and Sovereign, and as an abuſe of the goodneſs of his Benefactor and Redeemer. *Theſe* are the views of ſin which muſt diſſolve the heart in ſorrow, and prompt the cry for mercy: O God! I have violated the laws which in wisdom and juſtice thou haſt impoſed upon me, and by which thou haſt ſought to promote my felicity. My Maker and Sovereign, I have contemned the authority which in righteouſneſs and truth thou doſt exert over thy dependent creature. My Benefactor, I have enjoyed thy mercies, and not thanked thee; I have made them ſubſerve my vices, and thus turned them againſt thee. My Saviour! the blood which was the price of my pardon I have contemned; the

grace and love by which thou haſt ſought to draw me to thyſelf, I have reſiſted; the immortal glories which thou didſt conquer for me by the victories of thy croſs, I have ſpurned. "God be merciful to me a ſinner!" (Luke xviii. 13.)

In their ideas, alſo, concerning the *fruits* of repentance, men frequently moſt eſſentially err.

As was before obſerved, they err in not laying ſufficient ſtreſs on thoſe fruits of righteouſneſs which are inſeparable from genuine repentance. They are apt to conſider repentance as an exerciſe which is at once to be performed; inſtead of viewing it as a work which, in regard to the conteſt in which it engages us with ſin, and temptation, and the deſires, and the endeavours which it inſpires after holineſs, after new obedience,

after increaſing conformity to the divine image, is to be the buſineſs of life. They are apt to conſider repentance as performed, when the ſoul has been ſtruck with conviction; when ſhe has been humbled by a ſenſe of her ſins; when, with ſtrong crying and tears, ſhe implored mercy. But theſe are only the beginnings of repentance; the firſt emotions of that ſorrow which muſt be ſtrengthened to a lively deteſtation and renunciation of every ſinful paſſion, purſuit, and practice. Theſe are only the firſt ſtages of the converſion which muſt be perfected by that complete and radical change of mind and heart from ſin to holineſs, which is the eſſence of repentance, and which makes the ſubject of it a new man in Chriſt Jeſus.

But in this change from ſin to holi-

neſs, in this new obedience, which is the external effect of penitential ſorrow when genuine, the moſt frequent and dangerous error is, that men do not make it *univerſal* and *radical.* They will ſacrifice ſome of their vices, and ſhow indulgence to others. They will cultivate ſome of the graces of the Christian, and undervalue and neglect others. Entering the temple of holineſs, they wiſh to carry into its ſacred courts ſome of the indulgences of the ſinful world which they forſake; and of the divine graces which adorn this temple, they ſelect thoſe moſt congenial to their particular temperament and diſpoſition, while others, equally eſſential and ſplendid, they paſs by and undervalue.

But in the view of the true penitent, *every* ſinful indulgence is hateful, *every*

grace and virtue precious. The ſame God, the ſame Saviour, hath forbidden or enjoined them *all*. "Come out from among them, and be ye ſeparate, and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. vi. 17), is a voice which continually ſounds in his ears, and which he obeys by ſhunning the cuſtoms of a ſinful world, and by conſtant warfare with his corrupt paſſions. "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. v. 48), is a command which engages him in the active and unceaſing cultivation of every Chriſtian virtue. "He that breaketh the law in one point is guilty of all" (James ii. 10), deters him from every wilful tranſgreſſion, however trivial it may appear. "Abſtain from all appearance of evil" (1 Theſs. v. 22), excites in him a holy ſenſibility which

ſhuns even the confines of ſin. "Forget the things that are behind, and look forward to thoſe that are before" (Philip. iii. 13), is an admonition which urges him on, with unwearied and quickened pace, to the prize of his high calling. "Grow in grace" (2 Peter iii. 18), is an exhortation which leads him to cheriſh, with increaſing aſſiduity and vigilance, every virtue which adorns the Chriſtian character, ſo that his path ſhines more and more unto the perfect day.

How adverſe to this holy ardour in the renunciation of ſin, and in the purſuit of univerſal holineſs, is the conduct of thoſe who make repentance compatible with the want of ſome of the Chriſtian graces, and with indulgence in ſome of the vices of the world. The

ſinner, in paſſing to a converted ſtate, will relinquiſh, perhaps, his intemperance, his debauchery, his profaneneſs; he will carry with him his worldly-mindedneſs, his ill-gotten gains, his little low tricks of overreaching his neighbour, his envious paſſions, his implacable reſentments. Perhaps he will even indulge in vices as hateful as thoſe which he has renounced—ſpiritual pride and oſtentation, raſh and cenſorious judgment. Often the very breath which pours forth the deepeſt and moſt abaſing expreſſions of ſinfulneſs and guilt, would ſwell to the higheſt notes of anger, at the imputation of one-half the unworthineſs which was ſo profuſely acknowledged. Often the moſt *moderate* and *guarded* indulgence in ſocial pleaſure is pronounced abſolutely incompatible with

the Chriſtian character, by furious zealots, who never appear to recollect that this arrogant denunciation was the very crime for which our Saviour pronounced a wo on thoſe zealots of old, who "truſted in themſelves that they were righteous, and deſpiſed others" (Luke xviii. 9). And, on the contrary, not unfrequently a *holy abſtraction* from every corrupting pleaſure, and an earneſt and habitual aſpiring after holineſs and heaven, are branded as auſterity, and hypocriſy, and fanaticiſm, by the cold formaliſt, who knows little more of repentance than the occaſional acknowledgment with his lips, that he is a ſinner, and a vacant ſupplication for mercy, neither prompted by his underſtanding, nor warmed by his heart.

O God! is it thus we deceive our-

ſelves? is it thus we attempt to deceive thee? Arouſe us, merciful Father, that we may tear from our hearts this veil of deceit, before the odious vices which it conceals are brought to light, by the beams of thy juſtice, at the laſt day! Teach us, O God, that *that* repentance is vain—worſe than in vain, an impious mockery of thee—which permits a compromiſe with any vice, with any corrupt paſſion, with any ſinful indulgence, which does not engage us in a conſtant, vigorous, unremitting warfare with them all; that *that* repentance is vain, an impious mockery of thee, which permits the wilful neglect of any part of Chriſtian duty, and which does not, by the agency of thy Spirit, adorn the ſoul with every Chriſtian grace, and the life with every Chriſtian virtue.

In regard, thus, to the internal exerciſes of repentance, and to its external effects, the errors are moſt prevalent and moſt dangerous. There are other errors, which reſpect the *mode* in which penitence is to be exerciſed by different perſons, the *power* by which it is wrought, and the *ground* on which it is accepted, which I proceed to enumerate.

2. As to the *exerciſes* of penitence in *different* perſons. There are certain exerciſes of penitence, which are common to all, and indiſpenſable. All perſons muſt be penetrated with a ſenſe of the evil of ſin; muſt feel and deplore the corruption of their nature; confeſs and lament their tranſgreſſions; implore pardon; renounce ſin; crucify the fleſh, with its affections and luſts; and ſerve God in newneſs of life. But theſe ex-

erciſes are not all required in the *ſame degree* in all perſons.

Difference of *conſtitutional temperament*, as well as difference of character and conduct, will neceſſarily create a difference in the *feelings* of penitence in different perſons. The ardent, the ſusceptible, will of courſe enter with greater livelineſs into the regrets, the lamentations, the confeſſions of penitence, than the more grave and ſedate. It is an error to require in both theſe deſcriptions of perſons the ſame pungency of penitential feeling and ardour of penitential expreſſion. It is an error which ſometimes depreſſes and intimidates the humble penitent, who is not conſcious of that warmth and excitement of feeling which diſtinguiſhes, as he is taught to believe, the more happy repentance of

others. And it is an error which leads men from the cultivation of the ſolid conſtituents of repentance, a view of the demerit of ſin, and a ſincere and perſevering renunciation of it, to value, and to ſeek as the principal and eſſential characteriſtics of repentance, what are only incidental accompaniments of it in certain perſons, warmth of feeling, and ardour of expreſſion.

Difference of *character* alſo creates a difference in the exerciſes of penitence. As they conſiſt in a ſenſe of the evil of ſin, in ſorrow for it, in the particular confeſſion and renunciation of it, theſe exerciſes will neceſſarily vary, according to the degree and extent with which the conſcience has been defiled by actual tranſgreſſion, or the particular circumſtances which diverſify their guilt.

The *unbeliever*, who has rejected the Goſpel of Chriſt, muſt not only repent of thoſe violations of the moral law, which confound him with the common claſs of ſinners. There are ſins of peculiar enormity, and requiring greater ſorrow, regiſtered againſt him—his inſenſibility to the glory of the character, and to the divine pretenſions, of Jeſus of Nazareth—his wilful and perverſe rejection of the mercy and grace aſſured to him by the merits of this divine Redeemer, and for which "thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil," were offered in vain, and of the life and immortality which this Conqueror of death and the grave aſſures to him; an aſſurance which reaſon and nature in vain ſtruggled to obtain. Theſe are the ſins, unbeliever, which ſtain thy ſoul

with guilt of the deepeſt dye. Oh, what remorſe ſhould agitate, what ſorrows overwhelm thee! what bitter confeſſion, what vehement cries, ſhould aſſail the mercy-ſeat of Heaven! Blinded by prejudice, ſwollen with pride, and devoted to ſenſual gratifications, thou wouldſt not bend thy underſtanding to the incomprehenſible but glorious truths, nor thy paſſions to the holy but conſolatory precepts of the Goſpel. And thou haſt ſcornfully rejected the Son of God, the Meſſenger of the Father, the Saviour of ſinners, the Lord of life and death, the King of glory, the Judge of the world.

The *ſinner* who has profeſſed the Chriſtian name, conſcience perhaps does not accuſe of having cheriſhed any doubts of the divinity of the miſſion and religion of Jeſus Chriſt; and he congratulates

himſelf that the crime of rejecting the Lord who bought him is not regiſtered againſt him. But haſt thou not put him to an open ſhame? Thou doſt deteſt the crime of thoſe who crucified the Lord of glory. Haſt thou not crucified him *afreſh?* Look at the Chriſtian name diſhonoured. Look at baptiſmal grace reſiſted, and baptiſmal privileges deſpiſed. Look at the favour of God ſlighted, the offer of pardon refuſed, the glories of thy heavenly inheritance ſpurned. Theſe are the aggravations of thy guilt which ſhould excite thy penitential ſorrow, and ſhould call forth thy cries for mercy.

Of wilfully and habitually reſiſting baptiſmal grace, and rejecting baptiſmal privileges, thoſe *Chriſtians* who, through the mercy and grace of God, have from

their *infancy* ſought to *comply* with the *terms* of the *baptiſmal covenant*, are not to be accuſed; and of courſe neither the ſorrows nor the confeſſions of *their* repentance can be expected to embrace *theſe* aggravations of guilt. But they much deceive themſelves, and indeed prove themſelves radically defective in the Chriſtian character, if they ſuppoſe they have no need of repentance. Repentance was one of the conditions on which the privileges of their baptiſm, of being "members of Chriſt, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven," were ſuſpended. And if the condition is not performed, the privileges are forfeited. All the exerciſes of repentance ultimately terminate in forſaking ſin. But whatever freedom from wilful and habitual tranſgreſſions, and

whatever active Chriſtian virtues, by God's grace preventing and aſſiſting, they may have attained, the duty of repentance is but imperfectly diſcharged, if they do not cheriſh a conſtant and lively ſenſe of the evil of ſin, and of their liability to its temptations; if they do not humble themſelves before God, in contrite acknowledgment, not only of their infirmities, of their numerous ſins of omiſſion, but of thoſe failures in the Chriſtian temper, or in ſome one Chriſtian duty, from which the beſt are not exempt; and above all, if they do not aim at that complete renovation and ſanctification of ſoul and body, without which every profeſſing Chriſtian has only a *name* to live, while he is dead to the power and enjoyments of the divine life.

Chriſtians! conſider how pure and ſpiritual is the divine law—how holy is that Being in whoſe ſight "the heavens are not clean," and who "chargeth his angels with folly" (Job xv. 15; iv. 18). Conſider that every ſin is an inſult to his authority, and an abuſe of his goodneſs, and, without the interpoſition of his mercy, would ſubject thee to his wrath. And then bring to the light of the divine law, and of the divine holineſs, your hearts and lives; and, humbled at the footſtool of divine grace, forgetting your higheſt attainments, you will confeſs yourſelves ſinners. The language of the Church will be the language, not only of your lips, but of your hearts:—"We have done the things that we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things that

we ought to have done." "The remembrance of our ſins is grievous unto us." Moſt merciful Father, for thy Son Jeſus Chriſt's ſake, forgive us all that is paſt, and grant that we may ever hereafter ſerve and pleaſe thee in "newneſs of life."

3. The only remaining topics in regard to which men ſometimes err in their views of repentance, I proceed briefly to illuſtrate—namely, the *power* by which repentance is performed, and the *grounds* on which it is accepted.

With regard to the *power* by which repentance is performed, there are two errors; that which, rejecting the neceſſity of divine grace, refers it ſolely to human ſtrength; and that which, reſting entirely on divine grace, excludes human co-operation. The former hereſy

would make man a perfect and independent being, and strip God of glory, of salvation. The latter heresy would make man a machine, and man's course incapable of virtue, and not a fit subject of reward or punishment. Not so the views which the Scripture gives on this subject. Repentance is represented as the gift of God, for he provides the means of its acceptance; he excites to it; he bestows the strength to acquire it. But his grace does not exclude human co-operation: for while, with the penitent Psalmist, we are to beseech him to "create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us" (Psalm li. 10), he addresses to us the exhortation, "Wash you, make you clean, put away from you your evil doings; cease to do evil, learn to do well" (Ibid. 16). There

is no view of this ſubject conſiſtent with the declarations, the exhortations, the warnings, the invitations of Scripture, or with reaſon, and common ſenſe, and experience, but thoſe which repreſent man as "working out his ſalvation by the power of God working in him" (Philip. ii. 12); or, in the language of the article of the Church, which repreſents "the grace of God as giving man a good will, and working with him, when he has that good will" (Article x.)

The power of the Holy Ghoſt, ſinful man, is to give repentance: but with this power thou muſt co-operate. Divine grace exerts its quickening agency in thy ſoul, checks thee in thy ſinful courſe, awakens thy ſlumbering conſcience, pointing to the wrath revealed againſt thee, to thy God inſulted and thy

Saviour diſhonoured, to pardon and immortality ſlighted and diſregarded. Reſiſt not this Holy Spirit, and he will produce in thee repentance unto life.

Chriſtian, look habitually and ſupremely to the grace of God, to quicken thy ſenſibility to the evil of ſin, to excite thy contrition, to produce in thee newneſs of heart and life. But, remember, this Spirit, neglected, will not exert his renewing power; reſiſted, will withdraw his preventing grace; and leaving thee to weak and corrupt nature, thou wilt ſink into obduracy and impenitence, into "the gall of bitterneſs and bond of iniquity" (Acts xviii. 23).

With reſpect to the *grounds* on which our repentance is accepted, there may be a fatal error—that which aſcribes to repentance any *meritorious efficiency* in

procuring our pardon, which would lead us to claim ſalvation as due to us of right, on account ſolely of our repentance. This would be the higheſt preſumption. This would make the Almighty no longer the free diſpenſer of gratuitous pardon. This would repreſent the Creator and Sovereign as a debtor to the creature and the ſinner. This would claim for man's imperfect ſervices thoſe rewards which even his perfect obedience could not merit. This would derogate from the neceſſity and efficacy of that righteouſneſs of Jeſus Chriſt which is the only meritorious cauſe of man's acceptance. Repentance is indeed the condition of pardon; that is, God hath promiſed pardon to thoſe who repent. But this promiſe is made, not in reference to their repentance as

conſtituting a ground of merit, but to the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, on account of which alone God is pleaſed to reward their penitence with pardon, with his favour, and with everlaſting life. The moſt holy works of penitence, laid on the altar as a propitiation to God, would be conſumed by the flames of his juſtice. It is the blood of Chriſt only which extinguiſhes divine wrath, and procures mercy for mankind.

Brethren, I have laid before you the moſt common and dangerous miſtakes concerning repentance. Seek, I beſeech you, to avoid them, by cheriſhing a habitual and lively ſenſe of the evil of ſin, by the review of your actual tranſgreſſions, by ſincere contrition for them, by hearty deteſtation and renunciation of every ſinful paſſion and purſuit, by re-

newed obedience, purifying your hearts and extending to every part of Chriſtian duty. Look for ſtrength to perform this work of repentance, in all its exerciſes, and in all its demands, to the grace of God. Look for the acceptance of your repentance even made perfect by all the fruits of righteouſneſs to the merits of Chriſt, the only refuge of the ſinner, the only confidence even of the confirmed ſaint.

Bear in mind, I beſeech you, the awful admonition, "Except ye repent, ye ſhall periſh." It was the admonition of Chriſt to his beloved diſciples; it is his admonition, brethren, to each one of you. Even now, from that throne of mercy where his interceſſions are poured forth, he addreſſes to you the warning, "Except ye repent, ye ſhall periſh." Shall the warn-

ing paſs away with that breath which, commiſſioned by him, delivers it?

Will you go from this ſacred temple as perhaps you entered it, careleſs, impenitent, devoted to the world? Yet once again, not to aggravate your condemnation, but in the anxious hope of ſaving your ſouls, I proclaim, in the name of my Lord and Maſter, the awful denunciation—oh, my ſoul, do thou remember it!—"Except ye repent, ye ſhall periſh!"

"I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."— *Pſalm* cxix. 60.

DELAY OF REPENTANCE.

"THE children of this world are wiſer in their generation than the children of light" (Luke xvi. 8). In worldly matters men are wiſer than in their ſpiritual concerns. This is a truth which the voice of inſpiration hath pronounced, and which daily experience confirms. It is particularly verified in the conduct of which moſt men are guilty, the procraſtination of their repentance, their delay on entering into a religious life. Propoſe to them ſome worldly object which arouſes their imagination and their paſſions; and though the attainment of it

be uncertain, and the poſſeſſion tranſitory, and unproductive of ſubſtantial enjoyment, you behold every deſire and power of the ſoul enliſted in the purſuit. Delay in the uſe of any means likely to obtain this eagerly-coveted object is branded with the odious epithet of a folly which deprives, in general eſtimation, him who is guilty of it of his title to common ſenſe and common prudence. But propoſe to men thoſe ſpiritual joys which religion confers; urge them to the care of their ſouls, thoſe imperiſhable principles which will exiſt when their corporeal part has mingled with its native duſt; exhibit to their embrace thoſe virtuous pleaſures which, exalting their nature, will conſtitute their never-ending happineſs, when the world, and all that it contains, ſhall be conſumed in the fires of the laſt day

—yes, propoſe to men objects alone worthy of their ſupreme purſuit, and gratifying to their immortal powers, and you behold them indifferent to the offer, or tardy in the acceptance of it. You ſee them delaying, from day to day, the zealous uſe of thoſe means which alone can ſecure to them theſe ſpiritual and enduring bleſſings. Inſtead of "making haſte, and delaying not to keep the commandments of their God," they continue engroſſed with worldly concerns; and poſtpone to a more convenient ſeaſon that proviſion for eternity which ſhould be the chief buſineſs of life.

Alas! that man, expoſed to the juſt diſpleaſure of a holy God, ſhould for a moment delay to avert the wrath of him who "is able to deſtroy for ever both ſoul and body in hell" (Matt. x. 28).

Alas! that man, the fleeting periods of whoſe earthly exiſtence may in an inſtant be terminated by a thouſand accidents which he can neither foreſee nor avert, ſhould delay the ſecuring of his eternal intereſt! Alas! that the heirs of immortality, to whom are offered joys as exalted in degree as they are endleſs in duration, ſhould delay to ſecure them—ſhould for a moment riſk the loſs of them, and incur the danger of endleſs wo.

This conduct is at variance with common ſenſe and common prudence. And yet it is the conduct which characteriſes the bulk of mankind. How few even of us, my brethren, can plead exemption from the guilt of it, and with ſincerity join in the humble declaration of the Pſalmiſt to God, "I made haſte, and

delayed not to keep thy commandments."

By procraſtinating our repentance—by delaying our entrance on a religious life—

1. We incur the higheſt degree of guilt.

2. We render our ſalvation more difficult and hazardous.

3. We fail to ſecure our preſent felicity.

4. We diminiſh our future rewards.

5. We even render our attainment of theſe rewards wholly uncertain.

By delaying our repentance, and our engaging in the ſervice of God—

1. We incur the higheſt degree of *guilt.*

It is the command of God, that we turn from our ſins, and engage in his

ſervice. He is ſupremely worthy of the conſtant homage of our hearts and ſervice of our lives. All the excellencies in the human character which excite our admiration and eſteem, in an infinite degree centre in him; and there is no relation which can conſtitute a ground of duty and gratitude, which he does not ſuſtain towards us.

He is our Maker, from whom we have derived our being; our Sovereign, whoſe authority over us is founded on his wiſdom, his power, and his goodneſs; our Judge, to whom we muſt render an account; our Father, who regards us with infinite tenderneſs and compaſſion; our Preſerver, who ſuſtains and guards us through the numberleſs evils of life; our Benefactor, who diſpenſes to us all our enjoyments; and, including every

relation of power and of goodneſs, God, our Saviour—our Saviour from ſin, from guilt, from endleſs condemnation—our reſtorer to holineſs, to peace, to everlaſting glory. Theſe exalted relations impoſe on us the moſt imperious duty to love and ſerve the Author of our being, and the God of our ſalvation. In delaying for a moment to render God this ſervice, we diſregard theſe infinite obligations. He who delays to turn from his ſins and to ſerve God, defies the authority, the power, the juſtice, of his Maker, his Sovereign, and Judge; he contemns the kindneſs, the goodneſs, the mercy of his Father, Preſerver, Benefactor, and Saviour. Higher relations he cannot diſregard: ſtronger obligations he cannot violate.

Poſtpone not, then, your repentance,

your engaging in the ſervice of God. Every moment's delay ſtains your ſoul with deeper guilt, and renders you more expoſed to the juſt diſpleaſure of God. "Make haſte, and delay not to keep his commandments." This is your ſupreme duty. To this you are bound by the higheſt obligations. The longer this duty is neglected, the longer theſe obligations are violated, the greater will be your guilt, and the more obnoxious you will be to wrath.

And, let me obſerve,

2. The more *difficult* and *hazardous* will be your *return to God*, and the work of your *ſalvation*.

Conſider the increaſe of your guilt by delay; the power of habit; the poſſibility of God's withdrawing his grace; the magnitude of the work; the certainty

that no more convenient time will occur —and you will perceive that delay will render more difficult and hazardous the work of ſalvation.

(1.) Your *guilt is increaſed by delay*, and thus you are rendering more difficult your return to God.

As your guilt increaſes, ſo will increaſe your reluctance to conſider it, and humbly to confeſs it. And yet he only who acknowledgeth his iniquity, and is ſorry for his ſin, can have any hope of receiving pardon. As your guilt is aggravated by a longer continuance in ſin, and contempt of thoſe numerous obligations that urge you to the ſervice of God, ſo in proportion will be the pain attending the conſideration of your guilt, and the humble confeſſion of it.

Sinners, what hope you from delay?

You are now averſe to enter on the duty of repentance; becauſe it is painful to contemplate the dark ſeries of your tranſgreſſions, your numerous abuſes of the mercy of your God, your preſumptuous provocations of his juſtice. But every day theſe tranſgreſſions are increaſed in enormity; and theſe abuſes of the divine mercy, and provocations of divine juſtice, become more numerous and aggravated. By delay, then, you are only ſtrengthening the cauſes which prevent you from returning unto God. Every day the review of your ſins, the recollection of your guilt, will become more painful to you. Every day increaſes the bitterneſs of that ſorrow with which, if ever you obtain mercy, your ſins muſt be confeſſed, and the ſeverity of that diſcipline by which you muſt be re-

claimed from ſin to the ſervice of God. For,

(2.) By delay, the *habits* of *ſin* become *confirmed.*

It is a law of our nature, invariable in its operation, that habits are formed by a continuance in any particular practice or courſe of conduct, which are rendered more fixed and difficult of removal the longer they are indulged. How, greatly, then, are the difficulties and hazards of repentance increaſed by delay! There is a natural modeſty, which bluſhes at the firſt commiſſion of a wicked action. The ſenſe of reputation and honour is, in the firſt ſtages of ſin, ſome reſtraint on the exceſſes of ſinful paſſion. But theſe ſenſibilities become weakened by the habit of reſiſting them. Conſcience, whoſe admonitions have been often dis-

regarded, ceaſes to obtrude her friendly voice. Her warnings being often contemned, they no longer arouſe or alarm. The heart becomes hardened to admonition, to warning, to remorſe; ſo that, through the power of habit, the ſinner is at length given over to "laſciviouſneſs, to work all uncleanneſs with greedineſs" (Ephes. iv. 19).

How difficult muſt it be to arouſe him who is thus ſunk in the torpor of ſin—whoſe conſcience is thus ſilenced, whoſe heart is thus ſeared! Like an inveterate diſeaſe, ſin has ſeized all the faculties of the ſoul; and by the moſt ſevere remedies only can ſhe be reſtored to health and ſoundneſs. Oh, we are rendering by delay our ſalvation more difficult and hazardous. *Now*, we are delaying this important work, becauſe of its difficulty.

But if to be juſt, to be merciful, to be humble, to be pious, to be holy, to keep a conſcience void of offence, to live righteouſly, ſoberly, and godly in the world, and to throw off all the habits of ſin, be *now* a difficult and painful taſk, how much more difficult and painful will it be, when thoſe habits are confirmed by delay; when that tenderneſs of conſcience, that ſenſibility of heart, which now oppoſe ſome obſtacles in the career of ſin, and render more eaſy our return to God, are blunted and extinguiſhed; and when ſin becomes the element congenial to all the thoughts and affections of the ſoul! Oh, let us not delay for a moment to enter on a work which delay only renders infinitely more difficult and hazardous. Let us eſcape from this thraldom, leſt its chains be riveted on us

for ever. Let us eſcape, leſt iniquity prove our ruin. Now, now is the accepted time. Let us repent, while it is called To-day, leſt we be "hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin" (Heb. iii. 13).

(3.) For it is poſſible that God, provoked by our delay, may *withdraw that grace* which is neceſſary to repentance.

"God, indeed, has no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner;" and whenſoever "the wicked man turneth away from the wickedneſs which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he ſhall ſave his ſoul alive" (Ezekiel xviii. 27). There are no depths of guilt which cannot be reached by God's mercy. Manaſſes, an idolater and oppreſſor; Peter, who renounced his friend and maſter in the hour of his calamity; the

thief, who upon the croſs was ſuffering the juſt puniſhment of his evil deeds; and Saul, the furious perſecutor, even unto death, of the diſciples of the Lord, —all theſe are exhibited as monuments of the forbearance, the mercy, the powerful grace of God. No penitent ſinner, however great his iniquity, ſhould ſink into deſpair. But ſtill, to keep us from that preſumption which delays our return to God, in the expectation that his grace will be always ready to aid us, to reclaim us from ſin, and to eſtabliſh us in holineſs, there are awful denunciations revealed. We are told that there is "the day of our viſitation," "the accepted time" (1 Peter ii. 12; 1 Cor. vi. 2), in which mercy is freely offered to us, and the grace of God ſtriving in our hearts, and exciting us to work out

our ſalvation. If, during this day of grace, we attend not to the calls of God's mercy, but deſpiſe his counſel, and will none of his reproof; if, while the light of divine truth ſhines around us, we do not attend to the things that belong to our peace, the night cometh when they will be "hid from our eyes" (Luke xix. 42). Oh, there is a night of darkneſs, when we ſhall "grope as the blind, and be in deſolate places like dead men!" (Iſa. lix. 10)—when that voice of mercy, which we ſo often diſregarded, no more pours forth the words of conſolation; nor that light of divine grace, which we ſo often rejected, guides our feet into the way of peace.

See then, oh ſinners, the danger of delay! The door of mercy may be ſhut upon you. Weary of admoniſhing you

who continue to deſpiſe him, God may leave you to "eat of the fruit of your own way, and to be filled with your own devices" (Prov. i. 31). Repentance may become morally impoſſible; not through any defect of God's grace, or failure of his mercy, but through the long-indulged perverſeneſs of your own hearts, which hath provoked him to withdraw from you his Holy Spirit. "Seek ye the Lord, then, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near" (Iſa. lv. 8). "Make haſte, and delay not to keep his commandments," leſt the day of grace, in which only this work can be performed, be cloſed for ever.

(4.) But ſhould God, in his infinite mercy, vouchſafe to you the gracious admonitions and aids of his Holy Spirit,

and, notwithſtanding your perverſe continuance in ſin, keep alive thoſe ſenſibilities to goodneſs, thoſe apprehenſions of divine juſtice, thoſe deſires for the divine favour, which at ſome future period may urge you in earneſt to return to him; yet conſider the *magnitude of the work* to be performed, and you will be ſatisfied how much delay increaſes the difficulty of performing it.

The buſineſs of ſalvation is too important to be allotted to a ſhort portion of our time—it ſhould engroſs our life. Not merely to ſhed over the recollection of our guilt the tears of ſorrow, and in contrite confeſſion to implore mercy, but utterly to forſake and renounce our ſins; not merely with ſuperficial and occaſional homage to addreſs Jeſus Chriſt as our Saviour, but to embrace him in all his

offices, with an enlightened and ſteadfaſt faith; not merely to abſtain from ſome of the groſſer acts of ſin, but to be purified from *all* iniquity; not merely to exhibit the exterior of decorum, but to be "renewed in the ſpirit of our minds" (Rom. xii. 2); not merely to obſerve ſome of the commandments and ordinances of God; but to "walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameleſs" (Luke i. 6); not merely to obtain the maſtery over ſome one ſinful paſſion, but to "crucify" (Gal. v. 24) them all; not merely to diſplay ſome one virtue, but to exhibit all the graces of the Spirit, "to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godlineſs, and brotherly kindneſs, and charity" (2 Peter i. 5–7); not merely to perform occa-

ſionally ſome one deed of piety or mercy, but to abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs;—this is the work of the Chriſtian,—a work immenſely great in itſelf, and rendered more difficult from its oppoſition to many powerful propenſities of our nature, and to the temptations which conſtantly aſſail us in the world.

It is a warfare in which the moſt formidable enemies muſt be overcome to gain a triumph. It is a race in which every power of the ſoul muſt be inceſſantly and vigorouſly exerted to obtain the prize. The triumph cannot be gained, nor the prize won, but by courage, reſolution, watchfulneſs, zeal, perſeverance. And is this a work to be delayed? A work which requires the whole period of our life, is it to occupy only a portion, and that perhaps only a

ſmall portion, of it? A work which requires the exertion of all our faculties in their higheſt vigour, ſhall it be deferred to the time of ſickneſs or old age? The period of ſickneſs and old age, when ſinking nature requires to be enlivened by the hopes, and fortified by the conſolations, of religion, is that the period in which the ſoul can ſuſtain the ſorrows and pangs of repentance? When her powers are enfeebled by the infirmities of the body, her decaying companion, and by long-continued exertion, is that the time to engage in the high exerciſes of faith—in a conteſt with thoſe temptations which, from having often ſeduced us, have become our maſters—with thoſe paſſions which, often indulged, have uſurped dominion over us? Alas! fatal may prove this delay! The buſineſs of

ſalvation is the buſineſs of the preſent moment. Poſtpone it—it may never be performed.

(5.) For, ſtill further, you poſtpone your repentance under the certainty that a *more convenient ſeaſon* for the performance of it will *never occur.*

Whatever difficulties now exiſt, will exiſt hereafter, increaſed by delay. Whatever oppoſition you now experience, will by delay become more formidable. If now theſe difficulties and this oppoſition deter you from a religious life, what folly to expect that hereafter, when they are become formidable, they will intimidate you leſs. If now you are averſe to the exerciſes of penitence and piety, what folly to expect that you will be more inclined to them at ſome future period, when, by indulgence, your averſion to

them has increaſed. *Now*, *now* is the moſt convenient ſeaſon. Delay increaſes your guilt. Delay confirms your evil habits. Delay may provoke God to withdraw his grace. Delay diminiſhes the time in which the immenſe buſineſs of your ſalvation muſt be performed. "Make haſte, then, and keep the commandments of your God."

The folly of delay is rendered ſtill more apparent by the third principal conſideration which was ſtated—that by this conduct,

3. We *neglect* the higheſt *enjoyments*.

We delay, perhaps, our return to God, becauſe we are unwilling to part with the pleaſures of ſin. But we conſider not the enjoyments which we loſe—enjoyments as far ſuperior to the pleaſures of ſin, as the joys of the ſpiritual and

immortal part of man exceed thoſe of his groſs and ſenſual body. Is there no ſatisfaction in the teſtimony of a good conſcience? no pleaſure in freedom from turbulent paſſions, in well-regulated tempers and holy affections? no joy in confidence in God's mercy through Jeſus Chriſt, in the ſenſe of his ever-preſent favour and protection? Is there no conſolation in the well-grounded aſſurance, that, whatever may be the pains and ſtruggles of death, it will tranſlate us to a ſtate of never-ending bleſſedneſs and glory? Does the contemplation of the holy occupations, the tranſcendent joys, of this kingdom of glory, afford no comfort, no pleaſure, to the ſoul of the Chriſtian? Ah! all theſe enjoyments, ſo pure, ſo ſubſtantial, ſo exalted, we neglect, when we delay our repentance

and return to God. And we neglect them for the ſake of pleaſures which ſoon paſs away, and leave behind the ſting of ſhame and remorſe, which corrupt the ſoul, and riveting on her the chains of ſin, will for ever debar her from the enjoyment of the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.

But, ſhould you put in execution the vows of repentance—ſhould the difficulties which delay has thrown in the way of your engaging in his ſervice be overcome, and at ſome late period of life, perhaps on the bed of death, through the ſuperabundant grace of God, you ſhould become a true penitent—ſtill you will have not only loſt through life the pleaſures of religion, but,

4. You will have *diminiſhed* your future *rewards*.

There is no truth more plain from Scripture and from reaſon, than that, while our reward is of the free grace of God, our felicity hereafter will be in proportion to our progreſs in holineſs here, and to the number and purity of thoſe good works which, through divine grace, we perform. In that heavenly houſe, where the righteous enter, "are many manſions" (John xiv. 2), ſuited to their reſpective advances in virtue, and conſequent capacities for happineſs. And as in the natural firmament "one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory" (1 Cor. xv. 44), ſo in the new heavens the holy ſaints which adorn it will ſhine forth with different degrees of luſtre. To aſſign equal degrees of happineſs to him who has ſerved God with the full and uniform vigour of piety, and

to him who offers to his long-contemned Maker affections enfeebled by age, and no longer capable of reliſhing criminal indulgences; to the pious ſaint who is finiſhing his courſe full of good works as he is of years, and to the hoary penitent who preſents before the throne of his Maker only the late ſighs of contrition and reſolutions of obedience—would be a conduct utterly unworthy of that juſt Judge who hath declared that he will "reward every man according to his works" (Matt. xvi. 27).

Forfeit not, my brethren, for *all* the periſhing pleaſures of this world, *one* degree of that joy which laſts for ever. Let not your love of earthly ſplendour tarniſh the luſtre of your celeſtial felicity. Exchange not, for *all* the treaſures of the earth, *one* of thoſe pearls that would

adorn your crown of glory. Aim at obtaining a high rank among the beatified ſpirits that ſurround the throne of the Eternal. Seek to augment the felicity which awaits thoſe who patiently continue in well-doing. "Make haſte, and delay not to keep the commandments of your God." For,

5. Delay may wholly *wreſt* from you theſe future *rewards*.

By ſin, you have forfeited your title to them. By evangelical repentance and obedience, this title muſt be reſtored. You delay your entrance on this great work, the ſecuring of your title to heavenly felicity, though you "know not what a day may bring forth" (Prov. xxvii. 1). You delay a work of immenſe magnitude, of indiſpenſable neceſſity, on which depend the intereſts of eternity;

though you cannot command one hour, nor arreſt one moment of your fleeting time. You delay, though an eternity of happineſs depends upon your ſpeedy repentance, upon your making haſte to obey the commandments of God. You delay, until to-morrow, until ſome more diſtant period, the work of repentance, although this night your ſoul may be required of you. Is this folly? Is this madneſs? Can reaſonable creatures, who pride themſelves on their intelligence, their wiſdom, their prudence, thus poſtpone the concerns of their ſouls, when the next moment may cloſe their mortal career, and ſeal their eternal doom? Alas! that doom, if repentance has been delayed, will be everlaſting wo!

"Make haſte, then, and delay not to keep the commandments of your God."

To every ſtate of life this exhortation will apply.

YOUTH is the fitteſt ſeaſon for commencing a religious courſe; for then the habits of ſin are not formed, and the ingenuous heart is moſt ſuſceptible of the impreſſions of divine grace. And perhaps youth is the only ſeaſon allotted to many as the period of their probation. They are ſummoned to an eternal world before they have arrived at the vigour of mature age.

And if this period be reached, and the work of repentance be not performed—then let it be commenced before the powers of the ſoul loſe their full vigour to conflict with temptation, and the devotion of our life to God loſe its value in his ſight.

For, ſhould his mercy have ſpared us

until old age, alas! what then can we offer him but feeble powers, cold and ſluggiſh affections, languid exertions in his ſervice? Alas! how can we then ſuſtain the agonies of penitence? how can we then ſtruggle with inveterate habits? how can we then, with full purpoſe of heart, ſerve that God whom we have hitherto deſpiſed? Yet, with God nothing is impoſſible; and in the worſt extremity we ſhould cry unto him who is mighty to ſave.

Oh, then, brethren! act in ſpiritual things with the ſame prudence which in temporal matters you conſtantly exerciſe. Were an important temporal concern at ſtake, there would be no delay—all would be eagerneſs, activity, zeal. The buſineſs of to-day would not be deferred until to-morrow. And are your tem-

poral concerns of more importance than your eternal intereſts? *To-day*, then, repent; *to-day*, enter on that religious courſe which only can bring you peace here and hereafter. Could the priſons of deſpair be now uncloſed, and could you aſk the unhappy ſpirits that are there conſigned to weeping, wailing, and gnaſhing of teeth, the cauſe of their ruin, an anſwer would iſſue that would appal the ſtouteſt boſom—it was DELAY.

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